

**Testimony Supporting**

**S.B. 927: An Act Concerning Requirements for Early Childhood Educators**

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Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

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Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and distinguished Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

We are submitting testimony today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

**Connecticut Voices for Children strongly supports the implementation of S.B. 927, which would amend the preschool teacher standards established by PA 05-245 for school readiness programs.**

In 2005, legislation was passed that created a new requirement for teachers in preschool classrooms that were recipients of school readiness funding. Currently, a school readiness classroom is only required to have one adult who has a child development associate degree and 12 college credits (usually equal to four courses). The requirements set out in PA 05-245 require that each classroom have an adult with a minimum of either a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, childhood development, or a related field, or a certification with an endorsement in early childhood education or special education by July 1, 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Currently, only 41% of the teachers in state-funded programs hold bachelor's degrees and only 25% of the teachers in these programs hold associate degrees.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the Connecticut Charters-a-Course scholarship program closed in December 2010 after expending all its funding, and can no longer provide scholarships for early care and education staff who want to take courses to earn a bachelor's or associate's degree.<sup>3</sup> Given the current qualifications of publicly-funded early care and education staff and the limited funding available for professional development, Public Act 05-245 sets a goal that cannot be met within four years.<sup>4</sup>

Senate Bill 927 would maintain the intent of PA 05-245, which was to raise the standards and qualifications for teachers working with the state's youngest children, while creating a goal that is attainable. This new proposal requires that by 2015, at least 50% of early childhood teachers in state-funded programs hold a bachelor's degree from an approved, competency-based program or hold a teaching certification with endorsement in early childhood education. The remaining teachers must hold an associate degree from an approved, competency-based program.<sup>5</sup> It also requires that by 2020, all teachers in state-funded programs hold a bachelor's degree from an approved, competency-based program.

This proposal remains consistent with research demonstrating that effective early childhood teachers have specific knowledge and competencies to teach young children;<sup>6</sup> falls in line with national NAEYC<sup>7</sup> and Head Start<sup>8</sup> standards; and establishes a high standard of competence for CT early childhood teachers.

We also support the addition of language authorizing the use of unexpended school readiness funds to assist local school readiness programs' efforts to satisfy staff qualifications. However, we recognize that in past years, school readiness funds have been fully expended,<sup>9</sup> and as such, it would be helpful to add additional sources of professional development assistance for programs in the future.

We believe, given the current makeup of the early childhood field, that modifying teacher requirements as proposed in Senate Bill 927 would create a target that could actually be reached. **Accordingly, we strongly support Senate Bill 927.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about Public Act 05-245, see "Public Act 05-245: An Act Concerning Education Implementer Provisions," *Connecticut General Assembly* (2005), available at <http://cga.ct.gov/2005/ACT/PA/2005PA-00245-R00HB-06989-PA.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> "Publicly funded" refers to all SDE School Readiness, DSS state funded centers, and state-funded Head Start. Information from Darlene Ragozzine, Connecticut Charts-a-Course, taken from the Connecticut Charts-a-Course Professional Registry and provided via e-mail on February 14, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Information provided by Darlene Ragozzine, Connecticut Charts-a-Course, via e-mail, on February 15, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Early Childhood Workforce Subcommittee, "Alternative Proposal for Teacher Qualifications: PowerPoint Presentation." Presented at the Early Childhood Cabinet Meeting on November 10, 2008 by Michael Meotti, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Higher Education, and Carlota Schechter, Senior Associate, Connecticut Department of Higher Education.

<sup>5</sup> Appropriate institutions of higher education must be accredited by the Board of Governors of Higher Education, or must be regionally accredited.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Pianta and Carolee Howes, "The Promise of Pre-K" (2009).

<sup>7</sup> "Criteria Related to Staff Qualifications," *NAEYC* (accessed on February 15, 2011), available at <http://www.naeyc.org/academy/pursuing/edquals/criteria>.

<sup>8</sup> "Statutory Degree and Credentialing Requirements for Head Start Teaching Staff," *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services* (August 2008), available at [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Program%20Design%20and%20Management/Head%20Start%20Requirements/IMS\\_and\\_PIs\\_in\\_PDF/PDF\\_IMs/IM2008/ACF-IM-HS-08-12.pdf](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Program%20Design%20and%20Management/Head%20Start%20Requirements/IMS_and_PIs_in_PDF/PDF_IMs/IM2008/ACF-IM-HS-08-12.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Annemarie Hillman, "Impact of the Appropriations Committee's Proposed FY 11 Budget on Early Care and Education" (March 2010), available at <http://ctkidslink.org/publications/ece10appropsfy11budgetimpact.pdf>.